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XXIV.—*On certain Aborigines of the Andaman Islands.* By Colonel ALBERT FYTCHE, Commissioner of the Tenasserim and Martaban Provinces.

[*Read July 10th, 1866.*]

A CHANCE has occurred to me lately of observing three Aborigines of the Andamans, who were captured in the vicinity of Port Blair, some four months ago, in an attempt, together with others of their countrymen, to acquire possession of the working implements of a party of convicts. They were however surrounded by the convicts, who happened to be in considerable numbers at the time, and as many as seven of them were taken prisoners. These were deprived of their arms, and detained for some weeks at Port Blair, when one of them managed to effect his escape, and three others were released from durance. The remaining three who were less advanced in years than the rest of the party, it was deemed advisable to send off by a steamer leaving the settlement for Rangoon, with a view to ascertain whether some knowledge of their language could be acquired, and at the same time to impart to them some idea of the power and resources of their captors.

While in Rangoon, they were lodged for security's sake within the precincts of the jail, under charge of an English sailor, who took them out daily for a walk about the town and suburbs. Though regarded with great curiosity by the Burmese, they did not appear to be at all disconcerted by the notice they occasioned. No progress was however made in acquiring means of communication with them, and it was thought desirable to forward them to Moulmein, from which place they might the more readily be shipped to their own country, should circumstances require it. On their landing at Moulmein from the steamer, they happened to meet, and recognise in the street, an intelligent Burman, who was formerly in the service of Captain Haughton, the present Superintendent of Port Blair, a man who had moreover a passable knowledge of the English language, and who willingly undertook the charge of them upon the terms offered to him.

On the voyage from Rangoon to Moulmein, a friend of mine had a constant opportunity of observing them, and contrived to ingratiate himself into their good favour. Short as had been their introduction into civilised life, they had already acquired a fondness for tobacco, and he states there was no better passport to their good graces than an offer of a cheroot, and it was amusing

to observe how quickly they learned the pocket in which any one kept his cheroots, for they would point to the pocket, and give a gesture by way of hint that they would like to enjoy one. Being thus indulged, they would quite politely offer to take a light from the cigar of any one who happened to be smoking in their vicinity, and in return would offer a light from their cigar when it was needed. They were in high spirits when on board the steamer, evidently supposing that the vessel was destined for their own country. They had picked up the name Port Blair, and could always most readily indicate the exact direction of their own islands, pointing to the position of the sun as their guide; this they intimated by signs that it would be difficult to misunderstand. They were accordingly disappointed when brought ashore at Moulmein, and were at first downhearted when the steamer left without taking them, but apparently recovered their self-possession in the course of a few days. One, however, was ailing from a pulmonary disorder, from which he is still suffering.

Since the arrival of these men at Moulmein I have made an especial study of them, and their reputed similarity to the true African Negro appears to have been greatly exaggerated. The forehead is well formed, and not retreating, neither are the lips coarse and projecting, and the nostrils are by no means broad; the ear is small and well formed, the hair unlike the so-called woolly hair of a Negro, and growing conspicuously in separate detached tufts. They have absolutely no trace of whiskers, beard, or moustache, and have been long enough in captivity for the growth of such were it existent. The hair of the head also shews little disposition to elongate, it continues very short and crisped. The complexion is not a deep black, but rather of a sooty hue; hands and feet small, the latter not exhibiting the projecting heel of the true Negro.

The Andamanese appear to be one of many remnants, still extant, of a race that was formerly very extensively diffused over South-Eastern Asia and its Archipelago, which, for the most part, has been extirpated by races more advanced towards civilisation, being now driven to remote islands, or mountain fastnesses, such as the Andamans, the interior of the great Nicobar (where they are reported to be constantly at warfare with the people of the coast); and within the present century for certain (vide Crawford), and probably even now, there are, or were, tribes of them in the mountains of the interior of the Malayan Peninsula, Sumatra, Borneo, and especially the Philippine Islands, where the island of Negros, derives this, its Spanish appellation, from its being inhabited by a blackish race, variously known as the Negrillo, Negrito, or true Papuan. The race has its head-quarters

in the great islands of Papua or New Guinea, where some tribes are found attaining to six feet in stature, whilst others are as diminutive as the Andamanese.

Upon the island-continent of Australia the true Papuan type has never been detected ; but it formerly constituted the people of Tasmania, so numerous at the time of Captain Cook's visit, but which race is there now all but extinct, three or four individuals only surviving. The history of the capture of the last remnant of the race inhabiting Tasmania is well known, and their removal to an island in Bass's Straits, where the government provided them with blankets and a certain amount of food ; but it is remarkable that they died off fast, and chiefly from pulmonary consumption. The same remark has been made also of the New Zealander, belonging to a very different race of humankind, since the introduction of blankets, and other European clothing amongst them, they having also been subject to pulmonary diseases, which seem to have been previously unknown.

Now it is remarkable of the three Andamanese at present in Moulmein, one is already suffering from a pulmonary affection, and it is desirable that he, at least, should be returned to Port Blair by the first opportunity. The others also appear pining from this cause, and from home sickness ; they are not likely to learn much more than they have already learnt should their stay be further protracted. Besides it may not be advisable to overstrain their faculties. They are quite able to appreciate the kindness with which they have been treated, and it is well that they should communicate this to their fellow subjects. It may be finally added, that they have been uniformly tractable and good humoured, and have manifested a marked partiality for children. It is to be regretted that scarcely a word has been gathered of their language, the sounds of which are by no means confused or inarticulate. The reason is, that they persist in imitating every sound that is addressed to them, and it is only when they try to make themselves understood, or in speaking one to another, that an idea of their vocal enunciation can be obtained. Although in the prime of life, they are in fact too old to be taught much ; but should any accident happen to throw children of the race under the care of Captain Haughton, there might then be a better opportunity of acquiring means of linguistic communication.

Since the foregoing remarks were committed to paper our Andamanese friends conceived the idea of an escapade, and very nearly carried it into effect. One very boisterous and rainy night, it was discovered at 2 A.M., that they had absconded, and at dawn their foot-prints were traced to a sawpit on the banks of the Moulmein river, near their late place of abode, where it appears

they had collected a few loose planks, with which they had formed a raft, and boldly launched themselves off. A single large yam was the only provision they had taken with them as far as could be learned. Three police boats were sent immediately in pursuit of the fugitives, and at nightfall intelligence was obtained of their having been seen by a Taloing on an islet about twelve miles below Moulmein; on the same night they must have again pushed forward on their raft, which was soon broken up on their arrival in rough water, whereupon they swam ashore, landing at the south-east corner of the Island of Belookwyn, near the entrance of the river. They were there seen by some villagers, who, suspecting them to be runaways, took them to their kyee-dan-gyee, or village elder, by whom they were taken proper care of and forwarded into Moulmein.

On the evening prior to their departure they went to see Major Tickell, to whose charge they were entrusted, and appeared to be in particularly high spirits, patting him and others on the back with the utmost good humour, and talking to each other in (to us) an unintelligible language. When brought before Major Tickell on their return they appeared just as good humoured as ever, quite unabashed and unconscious of having done wrong. They were very hungry when first taken, as might be supposed, and submitted unrepiningly to their destiny, very probably conscious that they had escaped a worse evil.